

Satellite Operation for WMPLOTA

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A Twitter discussion began in April, after Chris, K7TAB, worked satellites from a WalMart parking lot in West Virginia, about having an activity focused on operating from WalMart stores. WalMart stores are everywhere and generally allow vehicles to park in their lots for extended periods, including overnight camping. This may have started out as a joke, but in the span of a couple of weeks, the activity was given a name, "WalMart Parking Lots on the Air" or "WMPLOTA." A web page appeared with information about the planned event (wmploata.org), and the event date was set for the weekend April 28-29, 2018. Rules were relatively simple: operate from a WalMart store's parking lot, in sight of the WalMart sign or a WalMart shopping cart if the sign isn't visible from where you are in the parking lot, and make contacts. Scoring was more complicated, given the number of bonuses and multipliers that were created, but a spreadsheet helped to make that an easier task. As satellite operators talked about WMPLOTA, other hams heard about it, including some who don't normally work satellites. For me, I wanted to see how many WalMart stores I could visit during part of the WMPLOTA weekend.

On Saturday, April 28, I noted 10 passes on the 4 FM satellites (AO-85, AO-91, AO-92, SO-50) between approximately 9 am and 2:30pm or 1600-2130 UTC. One was a 2-degree AO-85 pass, which I took out of consideration, leaving 9 passes in that timeframe. I wanted to see if I could work the 9 passes from 9 different stores. Around the Phoenix area, there are almost 30 different WalMart stores, including Supercenters, Neighborhood Market grocery stores, and even one location that only has a pharmacy. One of these stores straddles the DM33/DM43 grid boundary in central Phoenix, and a couple of other stores were near that grid boundary (within 3 km, or just under 2 miles, of the line). Using the pass predictions showing the gaps between passes, I came up with a plan to visit WalMart stores in Phoenix, Scottsdale, Mesa, and one store on the Salt River Indian Reservation east of Scottsdale for each of those passes. All of these stores were near freeways, which helped with travel between locations. I used my Icom IC-2730A 2m/70cm FM mobile radio and Elk dual-band log periodic antenna for my station at each site.

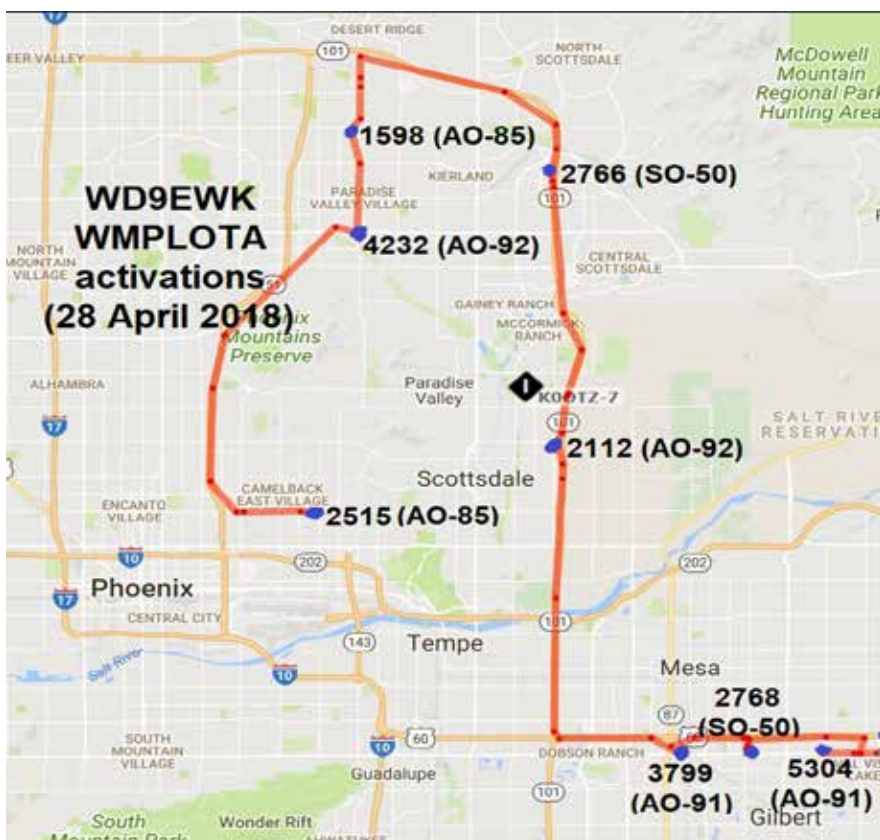
I started the event operating from WalMart store 2515, at 38th Street and Thomas Road in central Phoenix. The east end of the store and its parking lot straddle the DM33/DM43 grid boundary (112 degrees West). I decided to start here because I had only one row of parking spaces I could operate from, and I wanted to have more time to document my location on the grid boundary. This store is only a few miles west of my house, and the drive on a Saturday morning to get there was uneventful. After parking and documenting my location - see photos of my station with the store in the background, and of my location on the grid boundary - I waited for AO-85 to come up. When it did, I worked seven stations from this store. Four of these QSOs were with stations at other WalMart stores. This was an excellent start to my day of operating from different WalMart stores.

After that pass, I took the AZ-51 freeway to northeast Phoenix. There are two WalMart stores along Tatum Boulevard in this part of Phoenix, and I planned on working from both of them. The next pass at 1650 UTC was an AO-92 pass covering most of the continental U.S., and I worked 8 stations from store 4232; some at other stores. After the AO-92 pass, I drove 3 miles north to store 1598 for a western AO-85 pass and logged 4 QSOs. One of the 4 was with another store.

For the 1800-1900 UTC hour, I drove the AZ-101 freeway to Scottsdale for two more stores. The first of these stores, 2766, was in north Scottsdale. I worked a SO-50 pass a few minutes after 1800 UTC, logging 5 QSOs including one with another WalMart store. Now things got interesting. As SO-50 disappeared, I had 10 minutes to travel over 7 miles south on the AZ-101 freeway to store 2112 on the Salt River reservation near Scottsdale. I stopped working SO-50 a couple of minutes before LOS, packed my car, and arrived just in time for the start of the western AO-92 pass at 1826 UTC. Although I missed the first two minutes of it, I worked six stations, one of those at a WalMart store.

At this point, I had successfully made contacts from five different WalMart stores, and the gaps between passes were longer for the remaining four passes. I planned to visit a group of WalMart stores along the US-60 freeway in Mesa, where these stores were separated by two miles. This made travel between stores easier for the remaining four passes.

A few minutes after 1900 UTC, I targeted an eastern AO-91 pass that covered from coast to coast. I worked this pass from store 3799, at Country Club Drive (AZ-87) on the south side of the US-60 freeway. Even with



the normally crowded conditions on AO-91, I worked eight stations from this location, including three other WalMart stores.

A half-hour later, I had an overhead SO-50 pass I worked from store 2768 at Stapley Drive and the US-60 freeway, two miles east of store 3799. From this store, I logged eight contacts, including three from other WalMart stores. In addition to the WMPLOTA activity, AD0DX was operating from the DM68/DM69/DM78/DM79 4-grid intersection in Colorado. Everyone was able to make QSOs, without the congestion heard from the earlier AO-91 pass.

About 45 minutes after SO-50 LOS, I had another AO-91 pass at 2045 UTC. I drove another two miles east to Lindsay Drive and WalMart store 5304, a Neighborhood Market grocery store. I worked six stations from there, including another WalMart store and two stations who told me I was their first satellite QSO. By early afternoon, the

temperature had reached 100 degrees.

After the AO-91 pass, I drove another two miles to WalMart store 5428 for a low western SO-50 pass, the last of the nine passes I planned to work. Unfortunately, I heard nobody else on this pass.

For the eight stores I visited, I logged a total of 52 contacts. One of the eight stores sat on a grid boundary, and two others were near a grid boundary. I took pictures of my station, including a picture with a WalMart store and U.S. flag in the background, along with claiming other bonuses, multipliers, and awards for my 6.5 hours playing radio from WalMart stores. I was able to work at least one other WalMart store at each of the eight stores I visited. Justin, K5EM, created a spreadsheet which captured the scoring for this event, including all of the multipliers and bonuses. With this scoring, I claimed a score of 9313 points for my 52 QSOs from 8 different WalMart stores. Had I operated from more stores, or spent more time at the

stores I visited, I could have easily pushed the score into five digits.

WMPLOTA may have started out as a bit of a joke, but many satellite operators showed up and worked stations throughout the weekend. If there are other WMPLOTA activities in the future, I will try this again. I'd like to visit different stores, and maybe add in non-FM satellites. Lots of options to consider...🌐



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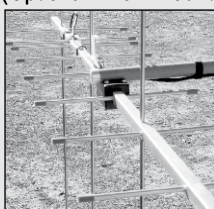
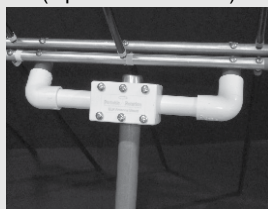


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